

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 04549 081909Z

ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7088

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY KABUL POUCH

AMCONSUL KARACHI

AMCONSUL LAHORE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

CINCPAC

CONFIDENTIAL ISLAMABAD 4549

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, SHUM, PK

SUBJECT: MILITARY COURT CONVICTS NEWSMEN: PROTEST CONTINUES

REF: (A) ISLAMABAD 4349 (B) ISLAMABAD A-33

1. SUMMARY: THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE MARTIAL LAW

ADMINISTRATION AND THE JOURNALISTS' NATIONAL UNION OVER THE
CLOSING OF A PRO-BHUTTO PAPER IN LAHORE CONTINUES UNABATED;
ADDITIONAL JOURNALISTS HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COURTED ARREST, AND
THOSE DETAINED EARLIER HAVE RECEIVED STIFF SENTENCES AND FINES.

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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 04549 081909Z

END SUMMARY.

2. A SUMMARY MILITARY COURT IN LAHORE MAY 7 SENTENCED 14

JOURNALISTS WHO HAD BEEN ARRESTED APRIL 30 (REFTEL) FOR
PARTICIPATION IN THE JOURNALISTS' HUNGER STRIKE TO FINES AND
VARIOUS TERMS OF IMPRISONMENT AT HARD LABOR (I.E. RIGOROUS
IMPRISONMENT OR R.I.) PROMINENT AMONG THOSE SENTENCED WAS NASIR

AHMAD USMANI, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PAKISTAN FEDERAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS (PFUJ), WHO RECEIVED THE STIFFEST SENTENCE: A 10,000 RUPEE FINE (\$1,000) AND ONE YEAR'S R.I. THE 14 WERE CONVICTED OF VIOLATING MARTIAL LAW REGULATIONS 33 AND 5 PROHIBITING POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND ASSEMBLY (REFAIR).

3. THE LOW-LEVEL CONFRONTATION REPORTED REFTEL BETWEEN THE MLA AND THE JOURNALISTS HAS CONTINUED UNABATED. JOURNALISTS AND OTHER PRESS WORKERS HAVE CONTINUED TO PROTEST THE GOVERNMENT'S CLOSURE OF THE PRO-PAKISTAN PEOPLES PARTY (PPP) DAILY MUSAWAAT BY APPEARING AT MUSAWAAT'S LAHORE OFFICE TO BE ARRESTED; THERE HAVE BEEN FOUR ARRESTS A DAY FOR THE PAST SIX DAYS.

4. OUR OWN TOTALS SHOW THAT SINCE THE START OF THE PROTEST TWO WEEKS AGO, AS MANY AS 46 PERSONS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED, FOUR HAVE BEEN RELEASED, AND SIX HAVE BEEN EXTERRED FROM THE PUNJAB. FOUR OF THOSE ARRESTED MAY 6, INCLUDING PAKISTAN TIMES ECONOMICS CORRESPONDENT ASLAM SHEIKH, WERE REMANDED IN CUSTODY UNTIL THEIR

MAY 13 TRIAL.

5. THE UNION'S ACTION IN REPPTING THE STRIKE APPEARS TO HLEGXDQQ IU (#)

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 04549 081909Z

DURINGTHE BHUTTO YEARSN AND THEY CONTEND THAT NO UNION ACTION, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF WEAK EXECUTIVE BOARD RESOLUTIONS, WAS TAKEN TO PROTECT THEM. ICA OFFICERS HAVE HEARD THAT SOME JOURNALISTS, WHO ARE NOT BHUTTO SUPPORTERS AND ARE UNHAPPY WITH BEING TARRED BY MUSAWAAT'S RADICAL BRUSH, ARE CONSIDERING BREAKING AWAY FROM USMANI'S PFUJ AND FORMING ANOTHER UNION.

6. COMMENT: ESTIMATES HERE ARE THAT THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESSMEN WILL CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME, AS NEITHER SIDE HAS YET BEEN FORCED TO ACT PRECIPITOUSLY TO SAVE FACE. THE UNION HAS APPARENTLY BEEN BUOYED BY THE CONTINUING WILLINGNESS OF JOURNALISTS TO COURT ARREST IN LAHORE, WHILE THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION (MLA) IS PROBABLY RELIEVED THAT THE STRIKE IS PRESENTLY CONFINED TO LAHORE, AND TO AN IDENTIFIABLE "RADICAL" FACTION. THE MLA HAS ALLOWED THE PRESS TO CARRY THE STORY, AND IF NO FURTHER FLARE-UPS OCCUR, THE MILITARY MAY CONCLUDE THAT THEY CAN RIDE THIS ONE OUT.

7. SIGNIFICANTLY, THE SENTENCES BEING METED OUT BY THE MILITARY COURTS DO NOT INCLUDE CANINGS OR LASHES -- PERMITTED UNDER THE MLRS CITED; THIS WILL BE NOTICED AND WILL DOUBTLESS LEAD CRITICS OF THE MLA TO ALLEGE A SOCIAL BIAS ON THE MATTER OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT. SOCIAL BIAS OR NOT, THE DECISION TO IMPOSE STIFF FINES AND R.I., BUT TO AVOID LASHES IN THE CASE OF THESE JOURNALISTS, REFLECTS A POLITICAL SENSITIVITY NOT ALWAYS PRESENT IN THE MLA'S PENCHANT FOR STERN ISLAMIC PENAL MEASURES.

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